

FAIRHOPE HISTORY PAPERS

The papers in this collection were written by undergraduate students at the University of Virginia during the 1980s. History majors, required for the B.A. degree to write a substantial research paper based on original sources, took a seminar I directed on the history of Fairhope. They had access to the microfilmed copies of the archives of the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation as well as other sources. I have selected sixteen of the papers for inclusion in this collection. Most of them deal with early Fairhope history, up to 1908 when the municipality was created, but some cover a later period. They are arranged in rough chronological order.

I have deposited one copy of the collection in the Fairhope Public Library and one in the library of the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation. I hope that citizens of the community will find them informative and instructive.

The collection is divided into two bound volumes, of which this is Volume II. The titles of all the papers in the collection appear on the next page. They are distributed as follows:

Volume I -- papers 1 - 8
Volume II -- papers 9 - 16

Paul M. Gaston

--Paul M. Gaston, March 1993.

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- #1. A BETTER WAY: THE STORY OF THE NATIONAL COOPERATIVE COMPANY, by Adam Behrman.
- #2. FAIRHOPE: THE BONDS OF COMMUNITY - THE FIRST TEN YEARS, by Paul E. Becker.
- #3. "MAKING GOOD THEORIES WORK": A STUDY OF FAIRHOPE, by Edward G. Lawrence.
- #4. FAIRHOPE: THE FIRST FIFTEEN YEARS --"MAKING GOOD THEORIES WORK," by George P. F. Carr.
- #5. LAND ACQUISITION AND THE FAIRHOPE SINGLE TAX COLONY, by Phil Townsend.
- #6. ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN IN THE FAIRHOPE SINGLE TAX COLONY: CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE, by Martha Dickens.
- #7. WOMEN OF FAIRHOPE, 1894-1903, by Ann-Marie Bolton.
- #8. FAIRHOPE IN THE EARLY YEARS: THE COLOR SCHEME, by William Dewar Hopkins.
- #9. COLOR SENSITIVE: "PROGRESSIVE MINDS IN A REGRESSIVE SOCIETY," by Greg McNeer.
- #10. FAIRHOPE AND THE NATIONAL SINGLE TAX MOVEMENT: THE IMPLICATIONS OF A SIMULATION OF THE THEORIES OF HENRY GEORGE, by Amy Boening.
- #11. FAIRHOPE AND THE SINGLE TAX MOVEMENT: THE FIRST TEN YEARS, by Stephen Kelly.
- #12. CONTRIBUTION AND CONTROVERSY: A NARRATIVE OF THE PHILANTHROPIST JOSEPH FELS'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE FAIRHOPE SINGLE TAX COLONY - 1897-1910, by Olen Earl.
- #13. FAIRHOPE: LEGITIMATE SUCCESS OR PAID POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENT? THE ROLE OF JOSEPH FELS IN COLONY SUCCESS: 1894-1899, by Charles F. Duvall, Jr.
- #14. THE DOORKEEPER OF UTOPIA: E. B. GASTON AND THE IMMIGRATION OF FAIRHOPE, by Ford Stephens.
- #15. FROM COLONY TO CORPORATION: THE FAIRHOPE SINGLE TAX COLONY'S TRANSFER OF PUBLIC FACILITIES, by Laurence McDuff.
- #16. THE WILL TO SURVIVE: THE PARADOX OF THE ORGANIC SCHOOL FROM 1935 TO 1945, by J. Richard Carlson.

#9

Color Sensitive

"Progressive Minds in a Regressive Society"

Greg McNeer

April 9, 1984

In a time when racial disharmony ran rampant, a small strong-willed band of Single Taxers cast their lot upon a pine covered shore in Baldwin County, Alabama, to prove to the world the ideas and values they held dear were not only correct, but also practical. The pilgrimage south from Iowa was not spontaneous, but rather a result of extensive discussion of soil quality, land prices, and climate, among other things, including the possible effect of the Negro on their experiment. The smoke and noise of the Civil War may have disappeared with the Confederate surrender at Appomatox in 1865, but not so the ingrained prejudices toward the black man. These did not die in the war's final battle, a mere thirty years prior to the birth of Fairhope. How could these enlightened men and women, who were reared in the bosom of the North and professed a belief in the absolute equal reights of all mankind, expect to thrive in a region where men felt their dependence on the peculiar institution of slavery ran more deeply than allegiance to their country? In addition, the Reconstruction years did little or nothing to mellow racial prejudice in the South. In theory, all men regardless of skin color were equal, but in practice the Negro was looked upon as a second-class citizen by southern whites.

Soon after arriving on the land that was to be their future utopia, the colonists found themselves faced with the volatile question of race relations, for "nothing happens in the South without race soon becoming a crucial issue; testing,

defining and illuminating values and assumptions and shaping public policy."¹ Through articles in the local paper the Courier, entries in the colony Minutes, and personal correspondence, one can trace the effect local prejudice toward the black man had upon the principals of the colonists and the slow metamorphosis of those principals.

The changes wrought in the social fabric of the nation during the postwar years affected all aspects of life in the United States, but the movement and change in the South was the most dramatic and far reaching, and it was into this area of painful change the colonists strode. "The drama was provided by the entrance of some four million Negroes in a new role."² Whites were, of course, constantly asserting that the social status of the blacks was precisely what it had been before the war. Bitter resentment and objection of whites toward the Negro's changed social status were commonly found in the South. Open hostility and social rejection were employed as weapons to limit the black man's newly found freedom as much as possible. Some manifestations of racial prejudice are found in the form of derogatory cartoons drawn by Southern artists. The caricatures are frequently "of supercilious Negroes with hats, gloves, cutaways, and umbrellas,"³ walking about in a vain attempt to reach social equality in the white man's world.

As the whites of the South fretted over changes in the social status of Negroes, their own society was itself under-

going significant changes. White skin remained the badge of superiority, but while no white Southerner was willing to disregard this as the "sacred cornerstone of Southern life,"⁴ those whites at the top of the social ladder found their positions challenged nevertheless. They were forced to share their command with the politicians - scalawags and carpet-baggers (whom they frequently despised) - and the Negro. The greatly transformed South now included many northern businessmen who inevitably became a part of the southern social scene. Like all white men that moved south before him, the postwar northern transplants could look forward to some degree of social acceptance unless he was known to be particularly hostile to the southern man's racially biased way of life. By the 1880's and 1890's, a great many Northerners had become assimilated by southern society, and they frequently became as vigorous as the ex-Confederates themselves in defense of the "Lost Cause." In this regard, a significant southern victory had been won.⁵

In mid-1894, a man by the name of J. Bellange~~r~~ was sent from Iowa to serve as the eyes and ears of those left in Des Moines, and to report on the environment and economic situation of all possible colony sites in the South. Letters from Bellange~~r~~ concerning Arkansas, Mississippi, Texas, Tennessee, and Alabama frequently appeared in early editions of the Courier. As part of a long communication that recounted his discoveries and observations of Baldwin County, Alabama, in vivid detail,

Bellangee discussed the negative affect Negroes had on land value and the development of the South as a whole. Upon examination, he found the Negro was not a progressive citizen. Not an inferior citizen mind you, but rather one who did not hold certain philosophies in common with the Single Taxers. Bellangee points to the Negroe's practice of subsistence farming, of living hand-to-mouth, as the chief cause of land devaluation. "If he attempts to raise those things that he can eat, he will raise only enough to feed himself and the land-lord receives nothing for his rent." On the other hand, if he raises a cash crop, such as cotton or tobacco, or some other inedible crop that brings a sure price in the market (however small), he rarely clears a profit. "Owing to the constant decline of cotton and tobacco on the market," and their sapping effect on the ability of the land to yield a crop, the "renter brings constantly less and less returns to the land owner and as a result, the price of the land in the Negro section falls rather than rises."⁶ Bellangee also noted a disinclination of local land owners to sell parcels of their tracts to Negroes, since Northerners displayed a dislike in the past at the prospect of settling alone in a Negro neighborhood.

At first glance, Belangee's writings appear to belie a racist bent, but a closer analysis reveals a different motive for his interest in the southern Negro. Belangee was truly interested in the economic rather than social impact of the black man in the area of the colony's future home. As a Single Taxer, he would

report any person or practice that caused the devaluation of land, regardless of the race of the non-progressive citizen.

In addition to their progressive economic policy, the Single Taxers believed in the equality of all mankind regardless of race; a notably controversial stance for the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They felt that

one has no more moral or natural right to any particular portion of the earth, the common heritage of mankind, than any other of his fellow men, and that to acquire the right to exclude his fellow heirs from any portion he must pay them in common the full value which their presence and demand give it."

This principle of equality grew to be a point of pressure and debate during the formative years of the colony. Problems arose from the restraints placed upon the colony by two distinct groups; those Northerners and Southerners who demanded racial segregation, and certain Northerners who preached racial equality. The colony found it impossible to employ policies that satisfied both parties.

Though the majority of prospective colonists embraced the idea of racial equality, Ernest B. Gaston, the colony's Secretary, received correspondence from an S.W. Hackworth requesting information regarding the colony's racial status. Hackworth felt that an amendment should be made in the colony's constitution that would specifically deny membership to Negroes. Also, a small number of Northerners wrote Gaston suggesting an "all white" policy to facilitate the colony's success. Of more immediate importance, the local policy of racial inequality had been in practice since the advent of slavery. Nearly every aspect of

Southern life in the 1890's, from the use of public facilities to the quality of transportation, demanded segregation of the races. In March of 1898, the Mobile and Ohio ran an advertisement in the Courier denoting the arrivals and departures of the trains that serviced the surrounding areas. Of the five time slots offered for departing trains, only one allowed a "mixed" load of passengers; five o'clock in the morning. The Mobile and Ohio reserved the remaining services for white patrons only.

Once again in 1898, the state of race relations in Alabama was illustrated when a letter addressed to the residents of Fairhope arrived on the desk of the Courier's editor. The letter was authored by a white neighbor of the colonists welcoming them to the South, but for reasons other than praiseworthy. "Above everything," wrote the Fairhoper's new neighbor, "you have come here to make this your home, and in doing so you have not brought the solving of the Negro questions with you." For generations, the southern white man had lived in, and become defensive of a world of rigid social barriers. The power and stability racial inequality afforded him was so highly valued, that the southern whites may have greeted a band of Northerners with much more radical plans of reform than the Fairhoppers with nearly equal good will were they not intent upon breaking down these barriers and mixing the races. The letter continued along its cordial lines letting the colonists know that

whatever might be your shortcomings, be
your religious and political convictions
what they may; the people of the south will

extend the hand of welcome to you when you come as you have come. We will not welcome any man or woman to our land, who tries to place the Negro on⁸a social equality with the Anglo-Saxon race."

The neighbor was diplomatically informing the Fairhoppers that the colony could expect willing and courteous assistance from the local whites when economic matters were concerned, but the crossing of the racial barrier would not be tolerated if attempted. The colony had been given fair warning not to meddle in this particular affair.

Though the criticisms of Northerners who disapproved of the colony's racially discriminate practices played a much smaller role in the influence of colony policies, they were given equal space in the Courier, for the Fairhoppers realized a great deal of support came from north of the Mason-Dixon Line. More importantly to today's observer, these criticisms clearly define the future conflict concerning racism. In 1898, Gaston received a letter from a man by the name of W.W. Kile; a man from whom the colony had been led to expect financial assistance. This supporter had become disillusioned by the racial policy employed by the colony, and wrote that he could not see himself becoming a member or contributing financial support to the Fairhoppers because of the disparity of black colony members. Gaston penned an editorial for the Courier in response to this man's letter. These criticisms, felt Gaston, only "illustrate anew the difficulties and differences of opinion arising in the effort to determine how far we can practically go in the 'application of

good theories' within a general condition of applied incorrect ones, over which we have no control."⁹

These documents illustrate the dilemma with which the Fairhoppers were faced. On one hand one finds the progressive minded Single Taxers preaching the doctrine of universal equality and equality of rights, and on the other, the deep seated and uncompromising bigotry of the native southern whites toward the black population. The fact that the move south made these northern progressive whites a minority along with the black man swayed the scale in favor of the preservation of the status quo. The question of how extensively the Fairhope Association should "follow the naked principle of equality unreservedly, regardless of conditions existing"¹⁰ was paramount. Gaston "could not recommend it," he concluded, "for to do so would likely mean destruction of the colony."¹¹ Interference with the present relationship between the races was far too delicate a matter to risk a confrontation with the local white population at the expense of the colony's chance for survival. The restraints local racial prejudice placed upon the Single Taxers left open only one option that would provide for the preservation of their economic experiment. The Association would have to institute a "for whites only" policy, despite the "fundamental contradiction of the 'good theory' on which the Fairhope practical demonstration was based."¹²

Interestingly enough, this policy of segregation was not contested by the Negroes in the area. Slavery had deprived the

black man of the chance to own land for so long, he wanted to have fields and a home to call his own. The Negro had no desire to become a member of an association whose ideological foundations required the rental of land, therefore no concerted effort was made to admit blacks into the Fairhope Industrial Association. This allowed Bellangee to write in "The Single Tax Review," a regular publication dedicated to reporting the progress of the Single Tax Movement throughout the world, that "in actual practice we have never had to meet the race question. No Negroes have ever applied for membership, nor do we expect they will."¹³ The lack of opposition to segregationalist policy and prevailing local custom made the slow deterioration of the colonists principle of universal equality inevitable.

Two early casualties of prevailing racial practices overriding the abstract principle of equality were Nancy Lewis and Delilah Washington. These two black women were found squatting on land purchased by the Association, and were eventually forced to vacate the area because of the colony's segregation policy. Nancy Lewis' claim of ownership to a section of colony land raised a lively dispute in early 1895. Because she had lived undisturbed for years on the land upon which her small field and house now stood, the woman was determined to hold onto what she felt was rightfully her home. The lawful owners, the Bowens, had agreed to sell the area to the colonists, and it was not until a deed and a bill of sale were secured did Mrs. Lewis surrender her position. "Mr. Pollay reported seeing the Lewis people in regard

to selling their improvements," and whereas "they had at first refused to consider the matter, they now seem favorably inclined."¹⁴ Nancy Lewis was paid one hundred dollars for her cabin and cleared fields, but her name did not disappear from colony records completely. In June of that same year, Gaston traveled to Daphne for the purpose of purchasing land up for sale because of delinquent taxes. He had a specific forty acres in mind, but Nancy Lewis and Parker Young were also there with money in hand to purchase the identical tract of land. Possibly because of the guilt Gaston felt for the initial compromise of principle that led to the original conflict with the Fairhope Association and subsequent displacement of these people, "he did not deem it advisable to do anything in the premises,"¹⁵ and declined to make an offer on the property.

An incident nearly identical to the Lewis affair appears in the Association Minutes close on the heels of the first conflict. A short passage on May 15, 1895, mentions that the Superintendent of Lands and Highways George Pollay had recently discussed with another black woman, Delilah Washington, the possibility of removing the improvements she had made on the colony's southeast forty. Permission was granted and two months passed before the issue was again addressed. From July through September of that same year the council strengthened its demand that Washington vacate colony land. A thirty day deadline and a warning of trespassing were issued before she pleaded her case to Pollay. In contrast to Nancy Lewis, she did not deny the colony's owner-

ship of the land, and was advised to see the Secretary where she mentioned poverty, sex, and race as contributing factors to her position. By the end of September, the council quietly acknowledged the successful conclusion of negotiations with Delilah. Had Lewis and Washington been white, the Fairhoppers would likely have offered colony membership in return for the land and saved themselves the hassle and money, but since the squatters were Negroes, membership was out of the question, and the Fairhoper's change in principle became irreversible.

Another stipulation of the colony's segregation policy was that the school retain its all white enrollment. The school was open to colony members and non-members alike, free of charge, as long as the children were white. In 1904, the race of three children desirous of enrolling in the school came under question, and the colony did not want to admit Jessie, Katie, and Willie Murray before an investigative council determined their lineage to be of Anglo-Saxon blood. The council found the children to be white, as did the U.S. census for Baldwin County in 1900, and judged in favor of the admittance of the children to school. The debate did not end there, for a

special referendum meeting of all members of the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation was called to consider the action of the council in admitting the Murray children. After full discussion, it was moved that the children in question were white, having attended a white school in Mobile, but a committee be appointed to investigate the case and report if they found otherwise."¹⁶

The committee did return to report that "the result of their

investigation was such as to raise a doubt in their mind as to whether these children are of unmixed white blood,"¹⁷ but as no further action was taken, the incident slowly faded from the public eye and became a skeleton in Fairhope's closet. With time, the colonist's original principles were becoming increasingly clouded, and transformed to parallel those of the surrounding environment. By 1904, not only was the color of your skin a necessary variable in the determination of social status in the colony, the purity of your lineage had become an important factor. The trace of black ancestors left one "tainted".

The change in the colonist's principles can also be traced by the increasing number of derogatory remarks in reference to Negroes found in the Courier. These were not conscious actions, but what appear to be habits acquired by the Fairhoppers from the indigenous white population. Marie Howland, in her Courier column, twice mentions a pasttime that betrays a modification of the original colonist stance advocating racial equality. At small evening functions, a Mr. Gibbons and a Dr. Sheldon won praise for poking fun at their Negro neighbors by composing poems or character songs and presenting them in the Negro dialect. Mrs. Howland reported that, "Mr. Gibbons recited a poem in negro dialect, as did also Dr. Sheldon. Of course the latter was comical, and it was greatly applauded."¹⁸ These affronts to the Negro were not blatant or of malicious intent. In fact, they appeared to be fairly harmless in themselves, but if the colonists were truly unprejudiced, as they claimed, and had created an atmosphere bereft

of racism, they would have made an effort to keep all such remarks from their daily dialogue. A reform community whose intentions included the improvement of human relations, and was not subjected to the prejudices of the South, may not have fallen prey to this fault. One concerned colony member saw this shortcoming developing even before the Murray children affair and wrote a letter to the Courier that noted

the all but universal way of speaking of our colored neighbor as 'niggers,' and this openly and unreservedly in public places where they are often to be found within hearing.

Notwithstanding the popular tendency here to run down the negro race, it is generally admitted that many of its representatives dwelling in our environs and having dealings with our villagers are very worthy people, industrious, thrifty, reliable - and this may be said as the general character of our surrounding colored population. These people are undoubtedly hurt by hearing their race so continually referred to in terms of contempt, as the term 'nigger' evidently is. Its careless utterance in the hearing of those referred to by it is inconsiderate, unfeeling, discourteous and unchristian, an offense to good manners and good morals. As it is, such an idea seems never to have entered our heads, and the offense is too recurrent. This should not be in a reform community, North or South, of people seeking to better the relations among men."¹⁹

One more blow to racial equality in Fairhope was rooted in an incident that shocked the colony in mid-1907. Two young negro men, attempting to escape the summer heat, went swimming naked in Mobile Bay within sight of the ladies bathhouse. "There was the making of a riot right there, which, with a few hot-headed white men, might have resulted in several deaths." In response,

and because the council felt "the throwing of the races together in their idle time is one of the most fruitful causes of trouble,"²⁰ the council "moved and carried that no more colored excursions from Mobile be permitted the use of the wharf and grounds."²¹ This incident illustrates yet another modification of the "good theory" and its application in Fairhope. Had the offending parties been white bathers rather than black, a few sharp words on proper etiquette, or common decency in the presence of ladies may have been exchanged, but talk of a riot or a number of murders would never have arisen. By this time, some colonists were guilty of entertaining notions as radically violent as their prejudiced white neighbors, and the black man was finally barred from nearly all that this single tax experiment had to offer. The Negro could not become a member of the colony, he could not send his children to the colony school, he was not permitted the use of the colony's recreational facilities, and he certainly was not allowed to become a part of the colony's social scene. The remaining interaction between the races in 1907 was limited to the employment of blacks by whites for physical labor.

Continuing along those lines, a more frequent practice of Fairhoppers was to identify the person in question by his race. If a person mentioned were an inhabitant of Fairhope or any other Anglo-Saxon, a distinction was not made and it was assumed the person was white, but if the person were not of white blood, a point was made to denote his race. Frequently within the pages of the Courier, one finds reference to "creole" or "colored"

neighbors. The voice of the colony once mentioned a Mr. Olsen was hard at work in his yard with the help of some hired assistance, or more specifically, "a couple of negro assistants."²² In her column, Marie Howland wrote of an Aunt Ellen Hill and described her as "another of the 'old time' negroes."²³ The article was cordial and supportive of the woman, as were most colony dealings with the black population (Gaston had written that the "Negroes in general and in this vicinity have no better friends than the people of Fairhope,"²⁴), but the colonists continued to distinguish between races. Again, this habit appears harmless, or even meaningless to an observer in the late twentieth century, but to be labeled a "black" or a "negro" in the southern United States in 1908 was a definite handicap. By drawing this distinction, the colonists did not physically discriminate against the black population, but rather they placed a psychological barrier between the races that only served to increase the distance needed to be traveled before racial equality was to be realized. Once again, the slow, indiscernible transformation of their principles kept the colonists from noticing and rectifying the change.

From its inception, the colony had been described as an economic experiment, but by the end of the colony's first dozen years the economic aspect of the Single Tax issue was beginning to be used as a shield from other questions facing Fairhope, namely racism. The colonists felt that if an economic theory was behind their actions, they could effectively duck the issue of racism, and be justified in their employment of discriminate

policy. In defense of the colony's actions, Gaston wrote that the Fairhoppers

believe the economic issue to be the most important work within their power. It is their duty to make their demonstration as clear cut and conspicuous as possible. To this end all minor questions or questions which would obscure the major purpose, should be relegated to the rear.²⁵

Reasonable men, Gaston argued, could see that economic problems and racism were causally related, and the resolution of the former would rectify the latter. In his defense, he claimed that even the "intelligent negroes," against whom he was discriminating, "who desire the success of our effort and the welfare of their own people, have approved the Colony's policy."²⁶ At the time of Fairhope's founding, the colonists had professed a belief in the universal equality of all mankind, but now saw racially discriminate policy as their "duty," in an effort to increase their land values and make the area more "desirable." It is hard to imagine any of the "intelligent negroes" Gaston mentions advocating such policy as this. By way of skirting the issue of racism, the colonists were able to ignore at least in their own minds, their deviation from the single tax theory of equality upon which they had built a community.

Despite their noble intentions, the members of Fairhope fell subject to the daily pressures of local racial prejudice, and allowed their ideals to slowly erode until colony^{racial} policy was indistinguishable from local practice. After the initial compromise that led to the displacement of Nancy Lewis and Delilah

Washington, the remaining changes were easier; the rationalization of discriminate policy as an effort to lessen tension between the races and to facilitate the conclusion of the economic facet of single tax theory led the colonists to believe their principles had never actually been compromised. This series of changes logically accounts for the racist attitudes that were to prevail in the 1930's and '40's, within the bounds of Fairhope, and the South as a whole, for the colonists had finally become entirely assimilated by the southern culture within which they had settled.

Endnotes

- 1
Paul M. Gaston, Women of Fair Hope (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983), p.7.
- 2
John Franklin, Reconstruction: After the Civil War (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p.189.
- 3
Ibid.
- 4
Ibid.
- 5
Ibid , p.190.
- 6
Fairhope Courier, August 15, 1894.
- 7
Ibid, April 1, 1895.
- 8
Ibid, February 1, 1898.
- 9
Ibid, April 1, 1898.
- 10
Ibid.
- 11
Gaston, p.8.
- 12
Ibid.
- 13
J. Bellangee, The Single Tax Review, "Fairhope: The Single Tax Applied". 15 October, 1903, p.14.
- 14
Minutes, Fairhope Industrial Association, April 15, 1895.
- 15
Ibid, June 10, 1895.
- 16
Minutes, Fairhope Single Tax Corporation, November 23, 1904.
- 17
Ibid, November 29, 1904.

Endnotes (cont'd)

- 18 Fairhope Courier, June 14, 1907.
- 19 Ibid, August 4, 1903.
- 20 Ibid, July 12, 1907.
- 21 Minutes, FSTC., June 3, 1907.
- 22 Fairhope Courier, March 20, 1908.
- 23 Ibid, June 1, 1901.
- 24 Ibid, July 12, 1907.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.

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